

"ENHANCED VOCABULARY PODCASTS IMPLEMENTATION IN FIFTH GRADE CLASSROOMS"

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Technology and research-based vocabulary instruction came together in a study conducted by a literacy professor and two fifth grade teachers. Enhanced podcasts of vocabulary activities developed by pre-service teachers in a reading methods class were implemented into two fifth grade classrooms during novel units. The data gathered from both classrooms showed elementary student growth on the novel vocabulary that was reinforced during podcast activities. The pre-service teachers received feedback about their podcasts' effectiveness for student learning and an important link was developed between theory and classroom practice. Podcasts reinforcing vocabulary offer promise as a literacy instructional aid.

Vignette

On a March morning in 2008 in Mrs. Smith's (pseudonym) fifth grade classroom, 17 students of varying academic abilities and motivation levels were listening intently to personal iPod Nanos© to practice and retain vocabulary from chapters in the novel, *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999). The teacher and Title 1 reading teacher were available to answer questions if needed, but each student was working at his/her pace independently to complete podcast activities that incorporate auditory, visual, and tactile learning styles. Students in this classroom were listening to enhanced podcasts developed by pre-service teachers in a reading methods course at a midwestern university utilizing teacher selected vocabulary from the novel.

Enhanced Podcasts and Vocabulary Instruction

An essential reading area where teachers work tirelessly is development of fluent readers. Three components to fluent reading are accuracy in word decoding,

automaticity in recognizing words, and appropriate use of prosody while reading. These components are a gateway to comprehension (Razinski, 2006). Vocabulary development adds to word automaticity which adds to fluency (Griffin & Ruan, 2007/2008). The National Reading Panel Report (2000) identified vocabulary as an essential instructional area for reading. Vocabulary strategies of using context clues to define words, defining words using synonyms or antonyms, examining shades of meaning of words, creating a visual representation of a word, using affixes or roots to define words, and making connections to new words allow the reader to repeatedly practice and retain new vocabulary. These are proven research-based vocabulary strategies (Cecil & Gipe, 2009). The vocabulary podcasts developed by the pre-service teachers used vocabulary activities that reinforced at least one of the strategies, and allowed the fifth grade students to practice vocabulary. Jenkins, Stein & Wysocki (1984) suggest a student needs to be exposed to vocabulary eight to ten

times before it is internalized. Vocabulary podcasts can provide part of the additional exposure needed for students to learn new words.

The knowledge to use podcasts as instructional tools has been available to teachers since May 2005 when the Education Podcast Network, <http://epnweb.org>, was started (Richardson, 2006). Research studies using technology and literacy education with podcasting, however, are in their infancy. Early literacy needs for diverse learners were addressed using audio mp3 file podcasts of recorded storybooks (Skouge, Rao, & Boisvert, 2007; Lamb & Johnson, 2007). In a take-home program called Reading Buddies developed by Grieg and Anderson-Inman in 2008, kindergarten students listened to 25 minute stories on mp3 players four days a week over a period of six weeks. The kindergarten students also took home the book being read in the podcast and completed questions and manipulative activities (Allen, 2008). An enhanced podcast is a multimedia format that allows images, jpegs, to be displayed in time with audio (Kolb, 2008). Enhanced podcast creation was discussed on a DVD video (Garay, 2006) but no research study addressed enhanced podcast effectiveness for vocabulary acquisition and retention in the intermediate grade classroom. Young & Bush (2004) state technology should empower individual students to achieve academic success and supplement and enhance traditional literacy materials. I envisioned both of these technology goals being met through the use of enhanced podcasts.

In my search to link theory, actual teaching practice, and motivating activities using technology, I talked to two fifth grade teachers in different schools and districts about using enhanced podcasts of vocabulary activities in their classrooms. Both teachers were excited about using podcasts to help reinforce vocabulary retention and to help pre-service teachers link activities they were creating with actual classroom practice. Each teacher agreed to participate in this study. Since the two teachers' schools were over 80 miles away from each other, I met with each one individually. Both teachers and their students were given pseudonyms in this article. Mrs. Smith taught in a rural midwestern school, grades K-6, with 277 total students. Mrs. Harris taught in an urban midwestern school containing grades K-5 school with 377 total students. Both schools had a high number of low socio-economic students. In Mrs. Smith's school 48% of the total school population was low income, and in Mrs. Harris's school 81% of the total school population was low income.

In the summer of 2007, each teacher chose a novel they wanted to teach during the 2007-2008 school year. Mrs. Smith wanted to teach an integrated unit using a novel and the time period of The Great Depression so she chose the novel, *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) which has a reading level of 5.0. Mrs. Harris choose three novels, *Seedfolks* (Fleischman, 1997) which has a reading level of 4.3; *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2000) which has a reading level of 4.5; and *The Jacket* (Clements, 2002) which has a reading level of 4.1, as she knew she would have stu-

dents reading at a variety of levels. Each teacher gave me a list of vocabulary words they felt should be stressed during the vocabulary podcast activities.

Creating Enhanced Podcasts

That fall undergraduate pre-service teachers in my reading methods course, Teaching Literacy in Grades 4-8, created an integrated multicultural novel unit. In this unit they were required to develop lesson plans for many reading strategies and use technology to enhance their reading instruction. One of the ways technology was utilized in those plans and in peer taught lessons was through the creation of enhanced podcasts. I sought to provide a link between literacy theory, practice, and technology by encouraging my pre-service teachers to create enhanced podcasts for use in the two fifth grade teachers' classroom literacy instruction. Each of the sixteen pre-service teachers agreed to participate in this study.

Proficient readers need a large vocabulary. Elementary students should experience many exposures to vocabulary in meaning contexts (Cecil & Gipe, 2009). Since vocabulary is so essential to comprehension, using technology as an instruction aid to help students retain vocabulary seemed like it would be a very motivating activity for both the pre-service teachers developing the podcasts and the elementary students who would use the podcasts.

Pre-service teachers were provided with several examples of vocabulary enhanced podcasts. Enhanced podcasts that my graduate assistant and I developed were posted

on the class website as mp4 files. The examples included the following generic activities that could be used with fiction or nonfiction vocabulary with the strategies each employed:

- Four Quadrant using synonyms and personal connections
- Amazing Analogies using synonyms
- Synonym Continuum using synonyms and shades of meaning
- Word Wheels using synonyms and antonyms
- Fashion Vocabulary using synonyms and antonyms
- Artistic Vocabulary creating a visual representation
- Electric Connotations using shades of meaning
- Word Trees using affixes and roots
- Vocabulary Brochures using a visual representation, context clues, and a personal connection
- Vocabulary Substitution using context clues
- Vocabulary Quick Write using personal connections
- Magnetic Vocabulary using tactile manipulatives

The pre-service teachers were shown how to write a podcast script and given instruction in the computer lab on how to create an enhanced podcast using the Macintosh software program, Garageband. They patterned their podcast after one of the provided generic examples or used any vocabulary activity found in literature and wrote it into a podcast script. The pre-service teachers also used the same vocabulary activities written in mini-lesson format (Almasi, 2005) in their lesson

plans. This format contained an introduction, explanation, modeling, guided practice and independent practice. Each pre-service teacher created two vocabulary enhanced podcasts. One used words and the words in context from the novel that was to be taught by Mrs. Smith, and one used words and the words in context from one of the novels that was to be taught by Mrs. Harris.

Mrs. Smith's Podcast Implementation

Twelve podcasts created by the pre-service teachers were given to Mrs. Smith on a CD in December 2007. Her students loaded them on the school iPods. She started to teach the novel unit and incorporate podcasts into her instruction in February/March 2008. Mrs. Smith divided the novel into six sections and concentrated on vocabulary for each section. The students were given a pre and post test on the 39 vocabulary words from all sections of the novel.

Mrs. Smith's classroom consisted of seventeen fifth graders, twelve boys and five girls, who were all reading at approximately grade level. She taught her novel unit over *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) using a combination of assigned silent reading, teacher oral reading, classroom discussion, and activities. All of Mrs. Smith's students had the use of a school provided iPod Nano and completed five of the podcasts activities during her month long novel unit.

I spent 4 ¼ hours observing in her classroom during instruction and when her fifth grade students were independently completing podcast activities. In addition

to my observations, I also took a video of a lesson plus field notes. Other data gathered included teacher and elementary student interviews, pre and post assessments on vocabulary, and samples of student work.

I observed students independently completing 3 different podcast activities, Vocabulary Substitutions, 4 Quadrant, and Word Wheel. Mrs. Smith assigned all students to be working on the same podcast during the same instructional period so that both she and the Title 1 teacher, Ms. Wills, were available to answer questions or provided one-on-one help to students as needed. The students also completed one more podcast activity during the unit, Magnetic Vocabulary, but I did not observe it. Students were given 60 minutes of instructional time once per week during four weeks for independent work on podcasts. They also could continue working on the podcasts during individual work time if needed. Thus, the exact times spent listening and completing podcast vocabulary activities varied by individual student.

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